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Mrs. Shcharansky Pleads Case for Husband

Amid the mounting euphoria over U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations, a woman named Avital Shcharansky was recently in Washington, D.C., reminding anyone who would listen that, as far as the Soviets are concerned, such agreements aren't

worth the paper they're printed on. The Soviets, she noted, promised to live up to the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki accords. But her husband, a leading Jewish dissident, was sentenced to the Soviet gulag in 1978 and may or may not be alive today. She wants the U.S. to help.

Her husband is Anatoly Shcharansky, whose only "crime" was wanting to leave the Soviet Union. She got out of the Soviet Union shortly after their July 4, 1974, marriage in Moscow, but he wasn't given a visa. When he persisted in his effort to leave and got actively involved in the Jewish emigration movement, the Soviet authorities "convicted" him in a kangaroo court of working for the CIA. He was sentenced to three years in prison and 10 years in a labor camp.

Shcharansky's so-called trial was big news in 1978 because President Carter publicly denounced his persecution by the Soviets. President Reagan has met with Avital twice — in 1981 and more recently on Dec. 10, 1984, at a ceremony marking International Human Rights Day.

In an interview with HUMAN EVENTS, she said that President Reagan expressed deep concern about the fate of her husband, and she appreciates that concern. But she believes that more can be done, especially at this time, because U.S.-Soviet contacts are expanding and the Soviets may be persuaded, as a good-faith gesture, to release her husband and others.

She said that her husband is just one of more than 40,000 "refuseniks" — people who have been refused visas to leave the Soviet Union. She said hundreds of thousands more people would come out if they could.

"I want the American people to know about the suffering in the Soviet Union," she told us. "I want to ask them for help."

Although Anatoly was transferred to a camp

after three years in prison, he was then sent back to prison after being branded a "bad influence" on others, said his wife. Reportedly, however, he has recently been placed in a camp again.

The difference between prison and a camp, she explained, is that in a camp the prisoner gets to see the light of day. In a prison he is kept in an enclosed cell all day and night.

Although they have been able to correspond occasionally by letter, she hasn't received one letter from him for more than three months. She said his mother, who is still in the Soviet Union, has been unable to find out from the authorities what camp he has been reportedly transferred to. "Anatoly has disappeared," she said with grave concern.

On International Human Rights Day, when President Reagan met with her, the President accused the Soviets of committing "brutal affronts

to the human conscience" by their human rights violations at home and of waging a "barbaric war" against the people of Afghanistan.

But the *Washington Post* highlighted the President's criticisms of South Africa's policy of racial apartheid, and only indirectly alluded to the Soviet record on human rights in the seventh paragraph of the story: "Reagan spoke before a group that included refugees from the Soviet Union, Iran, Nicaragua, Cuba, Afghanistan, Cambodia and Poland, as well as family members of people persecuted in those countries."

The *Post* deliberately ignored the great difference between South Africa and the Soviet Union. South Africa's internal critics, such as Bishop Desmond Tutu, can travel in and out of the country. People like Shcharansky are jailed and sometimes killed in the Soviet Union.